RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM QUALITY CRITERIA

INTRODUCTION

This section identifies the minimum level of treatment necessary to achieve a resource management system (RMS). Quality criteria are established that will protect soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources. These quality criteria are applicable to all land uses.

A RMS is a combination of conservation practices and resource management that when applied, will meet or exceed minimum criteria for all identified resource concerns. The RMS will be considered applied when all of the conservation practices that make up the system have been installed according to the pertinent Practice Standards in Section IV, Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

In addition to quality criteria, human considerations and environmental concerns must be addressed while developing a RMS. A Resource Management System Check List-Human Considerations is included for use in formulating and evaluating resource management system alternatives.

Although not specifically stated in each quality criteria, all RMS alternatives must be formulated within applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations. The use and implementation of these criteria will be consistent with federal, state, and local laws and regulations.

In some instances, the individual landowner cannot solve an existing resource problem without the participation of other landowners. In those cases, the requirements for a RMS will be met when the actions of the landowner are no longer contributing to the problem.

DEFINITIONS

Quality Criteria – refers to the quality level, state, or condition of the resource that NRCS considers to be minimally acceptable. All technical assistance provided to resource users will be directed toward achieving the quality criteria established for soil, water, air, plants, and animals. Resource quality criteria provide a means of determining the adequacy of NRCS technical assistance to land users by evaluating the ability of planned Resource Management Systems to achieve quality levels in an acceptable time frame.

Quality criteria for the five resources, and their considerations, may vary by land use.

Resources and Considerations – FOTG policy lists five resources for NRCS to include in all technical assistance efforts. The resources are soil, water, air, plants, and animals. The policy contains specific considerations related to each of the resources for which quality criteria were developed. Both the resources and their respective considerations are addressed individually.

QUALITY CRITERIA

RMS quality criteria consist of 2 components:

1. **DEFINITION**-a statement of the nature of the resource concern

2. **RESOURCE EVALUATION TOOLS** - are used to assess resource quality using quantitative and qualitative assessment methods of resource indicators. Resource indicators can be used to infer resource status and subsequently be used to determine if the Quality Criteria have been met. Meeting specific Quality Criteria for a land use will assure that sustained resource use and environmental quality are maintained. A list of tools is provided for all RMS quality criteria. The list is not all-inclusive.

- **Quantitative Levels** are expressed when well developed evaluation methodologies exist.

- **Qualitative Levels** are a statement of the desired outcome of evaluation methodologies, conservation practices, and resource management to address the identified resource concern. Qualitative levels apply to all listed indicators.

Visual observation, deductive reasoning, and professional judgment are essential components of all RMS quality criteria. The planner sometimes has to rely on reason and common sense to deduce a best estimate of what is believed to be the status of a resource. This is largely because of the absence of quantitative procedures or tools or the impracticability of applying known methods. For example, restricted capacity of water bodies may not be a practical resource consideration to measure, nor are predictive tools available. However, the planner can deduce whether a problem exists or not based on other sources of information. Perhaps RUSLE shows that very low rates of soil erosion are occurring throughout the watershed. The planner can deduce that there is no significant source of sediment. A significant reduction in storage capacity of a reservoir because of sediment deposition within the water body is not probable. The planner must frequently rely on deductive methods to address off-site effects. If deductive reasoning is employed, it should be documented as clearly as possible.

Another example of using a deductive approach in determining resource conditions is related to treatment standards. In this case the planner must assume that a certain condition is met if specific treatment is applied, and, conversely, if the specific treatment is not applied, a different and less desirable condition will result.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM CHECK LIST-HUMAN CONSIDERATIONS

A. ECONOMICS

1. Cost Effectiveness

There is a reasonable relationship between the cost of the system and the changes in resource conditions it brings about.

2. Financial Condition

There is an ability to acquire funds to install and maintain the system over time without destroying the financial viability of normal client operations and finances.

3. Markets

There are adequate and available markets for affected farm/ranch enterprise products.

4. Input Level

There are adequate or sufficient management skills, land, labor, materials, and equipment present or obtainable to operate and maintain the system.

5. Base Acreage

Base acreage for USDA programs is adequately maintained.

6. USDA Programs

The system would not preclude a normal degree of participation in USDA programs.

7. Sustainability

There is a reasonable expectation of long-term profitability for the operation as a whole.

B. SOCIAL

1. Public Health and Safety

Local community standards regarding public health and safety are followed.

2. Traditional Values and Subsistence Uses

Social, family, religious values, peer pressure, and societal goals are considered. Planned use of plant and animal subsistence resources accommodates the needs of subsistence users. Use of these resources will be planned for long term sustainable use and meet specific quality criteria for all designated land uses such as forestland, rangeland, and wildlife land and recreation land.

3. Client Characteristics

Client characteristics including age, planning horizon, special emphasis groups, and resources (limited and otherwise) are considered.

4. Risk Tolerance/Aversion

The degree of risk is reasonable compared to the alternatives.

5. Tenure

Tenure (owner or renter) or time availability (e.g. part-time, absentee) does not affect the ability to install, manage, or maintain the system.

C. CULTURAL

1. Absence or Presence

Absence or presence of cultural resources is established using the State Historic Preservation Officer's (SHPO)definition of cultural resources.

2. Significance

When presence is established, qualified cultural resources personnel according to the National Register of Historic Places criteria will determine significance.

3. Neutral or Positive Effects

The system can be applied to an area containing significant cultural resource if it has a neutral or positive effect on that resource.

4. Negative Effect/Mitigation

Systems can be applied if negative effect is avoided or mitigation occurs to lessen or eliminate those negative effects as agreed to by consulting parties (GM 420 Part 401).